

**A Study to Assess the
Vocational Needs of
Persons with Physical Disabilities
in the Region of
Hamilton-Wentworth**

**Highlights
Summary of
Conclusions and Recommendations**

URBAN MUNICIPAL

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GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

Introduction

The Ontario March of Dimes conducted a needs study between November 1990 and April 1991 to assess the vocational needs of adults with physical disabilities in Hamilton-Wentworth Region.

Over a period of 6 months, 427 individuals with physical disabilities were interviewed by the Hamilton office. In addition, 42 agencies were contacted.

A formal questionnaire consisting of 67 questions was used for personal interviews. Although the focus was primarily employment related, there were also questions about education and training, attendant care, housing and transportation. The agency surveys were designed to serve as a guideline for a broad-ranging discussion on the services they offered.

Individuals identified as potential candidates were initially contacted by phone to set up a personal interview that lasted between 20 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. Interviews were also conducted at relevant agencies with staff members who had adequate knowledge of either the programs and services available.

The respondents to the survey were between the ages of 16 and 64 with the majority having cerebral palsy or arthritis. The agencies, organizations or businesses included in the report provided a wide range of services targeted to both the surveyed population as well as a broader range of age groups.

Highlights

The sample covered the Region of Hamilton-Wentworth and included 427 disabled adults (2.3% of the disabled population between the ages of 15 and 64) and 42 related agencies.

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

☞ 43% were single, 38% of the respondents were married (or commonlaw), 16% were divorced or separated and 3% were widowed

☞ 28% of the respondents reported an income of \$10,000 or less

DISABILITY PROFILE

☞ The most commonly represented disabilities were cerebral palsy (15%) and arthritis (14%)

☞ 80% of the respondents indicated having a mobility problem, 51% of whom stated the problem was severe

☞ 84% of the respondents used an assistive device. The most commonly used assistive device was a manual wheelchair noted by 168 (39%) of the respondents.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

☞ 32% of the sample had ended their education before grade 10 as compared to 17% among the general population

☞ 61% of those who had their disability while attending school stated their education was affected negatively because of their disability. This was most commonly manifested by slower progress, absence due to hospitalization or inability to attend

- ☞ While 19% of the sample are currently enrolled in an educational program, 64% of the total sample indicated interest in future educational training
- ☞ The majority of those interested in further education and/or training wanted to take computer courses (50%)
- ☞ There was a relationship between the amount of formal education that an individual received and his/her employment status. Unemployed respondents were more likely to report having ended their schooling at an earlier stage than employed respondents.

EMPLOYMENT

- ☞ 20% (86 people) of the respondents were actively employed at the time of the survey
- ☞ 13% had never been employed
- ☞ 56% of the unemployed respondents left their previous job because of their disability. Twelve were fired because of poor performance.
- ☞ Over half of those in the employed sample were in permanent full-time positions
- ☞ Of the unemployed respondents, 69% were not seeking work. Of this group, 54% stated their disability prevented them from being employed. Two-thirds of those who dropped out of the labour market wanted to work

VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

- ☞ 48% of the respondents (203 people) had never been assessed. For those who had been assessed, one-third of the assessments had taken place through the Ontario March of Dimes

- ☞ Two-thirds had been assessed using tests or work samples while 22% had been assessed on their job skills within the center. Fifteen percent had pre-placement training and 12% had computer training

JOB PLACEMENT

- ☞ Half of the respondents had never used a job placement service
- ☞ 55% of those who had used a job placement service used the Canada Employment Centre
- ☞ 68% of the unemployed respondents thought their chances of finding a job in the next 6 months was poor

THE WORKPLACE

- ☞ 73% of the respondents indicated they needed special arrangements. The most commonly noted accommodation was an accessible worksite (60%). Special equipment was necessary for 35%, help from someone was needed by 30% and flexible work hours were required by 28%. Twenty-five percent wanted modified duties and extra space to move around or special hours were needed by 23%

ATTENDANT CARE

- ☞ 64% of the participants said they used attendant care. Of these participants, three-quarters required attendant care daily
- ☞ The most frequently used service provider was family or friends

HOUSING

- ☞ 47% of the interviewees were renting, 24% owned their own home, 17% were living in an institution and 13% in the family home
- ☞ Inaccessibility was the most common reason given for dissatisfaction with housing.

TRANSPORTATION

- ☞ The most frequently used means of transportation were a special or parallel transportation system (43%), driving one's own car with or without adaptations (26%), being driven by a family member or friend (15%) or public transit (11%)
- ☞ The group most dissatisfied with their transportation were those who had to be driven by a family member or friend

Summary of Conclusions & Recommendations

CONCLUSION #1

Training and educational programs are necessary for consumers in order to obtain or change jobs. *Workers with poor literacy skills tend to have significantly higher unemployment rates, lower levels of labour force participation and lower employment income than other workers (Perspectives on Labour and Income, Spring 1992).* In addition, Vocational Rehabilitation Services statistics show significant increases in successful rehabilitation for their clients who have received training (Operational Review, 1989). In this study, only 20% of the respondents are currently actively employed and the results show a strong correlation between educational level and employment.

The primary interest in education and training is in computers (50%) which is perceived as having high marketability in the workplace. It is significant to note that interest in computer training is equal for both employed and unemployed respondents.

RECOMMENDATION #1

An integrated computer training program should be developed which could serve the needs of persons with physical disabilities. Particular emphasis should be placed on acquiring and upgrading job-oriented skills. Due to the interest among the employed group, courses should be offered both during the day and evening.

CONCLUSION #2

Only 20% of the sample were actively employed when interviewed. Unemployment was especially high for those with severe disabilities. According to the Ministry of Community and Social Services, "in order to encourage greater independence...vocational services...will be required for increasing numbers of people, including some persons now...classified as permanently unemployable." (*Ministry of Community and Social Services, 1988*). Many of these individuals are willing to work and are interested in receiving assessments towards this end.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Community-based testing and assessment is required to assist individuals to identify their employment potential. Further study is needed in order to assess what would be the most beneficial as over one-third of respondents were unsatisfied with the current services available.

CONCLUSION #3

More job placement service alternatives should be available as there was strong interest shown by respondents. Programs should help in identifying and improving work competencies and assisting with workplace accommodations.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Placement services should address job seeking and job retention issues and include expertise to assist the employer and potential employee to make the overall accommodations required to successfully integrate an employee with disabilities. Occupational therapy services should be available to assist with modifications of specific work stations.

CONCLUSION #4

Study results indicate a current need for more attendant care services in the Hamilton area. A large percentage of individuals were relying substantially on their family and friends for attendant care in addition to other service providers. The need for respite care was prominent. The greatest point of dissatisfaction among current recipients was the need for more hours of service.

Persons living in institutions and dependent on nurses for their care will need 24-hour support care in order to move into the community. There will also be an increased need for attendant care from not only current users but also those not presently receiving service.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Service availability should expand to meet the existing need. In addition, attendant care services within the region should conduct periodic needs assessments in order to meet the future needs of the population. Special attention should be paid to providing a variety of services that are both flexible and affordable.

In particular, an increase in respite care services is required for those individuals who depend on their families for assistance. Similarly, an increase in support service living units is essential for those who must presently rely on resident nurses.

CONCLUSION #5

Eighteen percent of study participants are dissatisfied with their current housing. By far, the most important reason for dissatisfaction was inaccessibility. Unit size was also a key issue. Many of the satisfied respondents were living in government-assisted housing.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Funding and advice should be made available for people who need to modify their homes. In addition, an increase in affordable and accessible housing stock is necessary.

CONCLUSION #6

Seventeen percent of respondents were unhappy with their transportation. Greatest dissatisfaction was with the limitations of the parallel transit system including its limited availability. Many had to depend on family and friends due to the lack of alternatives. Satisfaction decreased significantly when transportation moved beyond the community level.

RECOMMENDATION #6

*Parallel transit systems in Hamilton-Wentworth need to be expanded in order to provide the quality of service necessary for people with disabilities, who must depend on these systems, to participate fully in the community and to decrease their dependence on family and friends. Special attention should be paid to increasing flexibility, expanding boundaries and lengthening the hours of availability. Research into the benefits of increasing the accessibility of the public system should be undertaken in order to provide alternatives. In addition, improvements need to be made to intercity and interregional transportation.**

*Since the time of the study it is noted by this author that some improvements have been made to the Hamilton system

Copies of the report will be available from the Ontario March of Dimes, Hamilton Regional Office, 20 Jarvis St., Hamilton, Ontario L8R 1M2 (416) 528-4261 OR Ontario March of Dimes, Provincial Office, Research Dept., 60 Overlea Blvd., Toronto, Ont. M4H 1B6 (416)425-0501 for \$15.00 plus \$5.00 for postage and handling. Please use the order form attached below.

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